

and implement regular disinfecting so students and teachers can safely return to the classroom. After all, we know in-person instruction is best for our children.

I have had sections of my State where at least a third of the lower income students don't have dependable access to broadband, much less the kind of supervision that they would need in order to continue their learning. Study after study has shown that kids have fallen behind while learning virtually, especially in foundational subjects like math and reading.

The learning deficit is even greater for students of color and those in high-poverty communities. One study found that, for math, White students began the school year about 1 to 3 months behind in learning while students of color were more likely to be 3 to 5 months behind. And the impact on our students isn't purely academic. As we know, there are serious mental, social, and emotional tolls to be paid as well.

We need our schools to open, and, of course, we need to do so safely. The experts tell us that not only is that possible, but it has already been done in States across the country. The Centers for Disease Control published a report in January that found: "There has been little evidence that schools have contributed meaningfully to increased community transmission." The lead author of that report affirmed that even in places with high infection rates, there is no evidence that schools will transmit the virus at a higher rate than the general community. In short, schools are not a breeding ground for COVID-19 as long as appropriate precautions are taken, and they can reopen safely.

The good news is there is already plenty of funding to make that happen. In December, the Centers for Disease Control estimated schools would need about \$22 billion to open safely. As of February 9, of the \$68 billion that was provided for K-12 schools in the combined relief packages, only about \$5 billion has been spent. So \$68 billion has been provided, and only \$5 billion has been spent.

Despite clear evidence that, one, kids are struggling with virtual learning; two, schools can safely reopen with the right precautions; and, three, that there is plenty of funding to help schools implement these measures, our Democratic colleagues are prepared to spend another \$130 billion for K-12 education without any sort of incentive or requirement for children to return safely to the classroom.

Sadly, many of our schoolchildren are coming up on the 1-year anniversary of their virtual learning. Unfortunately, there seems to be very little momentum for letting those students return to the classroom, and, unfortunately, by default, they are falling further behind.

Since most of the existing funds remain to be spent, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that

the bulk of spending of this new proposed funding would occur next year and beyond. In other words, this isn't an emergency relief bill designed to deal with the present need; this is about spending money in 2021, after which, hopefully, virtually everybody in the United States is vaccinated and we have established herd immunity.

Only \$6.4 billion would be distributed through September of this year, and the remaining \$122 billion would trickle out the door through not just 2021 but through 2028. That is, the majority of the education funding in the so-called and misnamed COVID-19 relief bill wouldn't even be touched until the pandemic has been put in the rearview mirror.

Now, I have advocated for funding to help schools prepare for a safe return to the classroom, and, of course, the experts, as I said, have told us that more than enough funding is already available to make that happen. So I ask: What is the rationale for asking the taxpayers to foot another \$130 billion bill if there is no need for that funding in the first place? And I would add to that, this is not money that actually exists. This will be money borrowed from future generations that is added to the deficit and to our debt. There is certainly no excuse to ram this and a range of other partisan priorities through Congress without the support of a single Republican.

It was January 20 when I thought that President Biden gave a very eloquent and appropriate speech at his inauguration, talking about the need for the Nation to heal, for the divisions to heal, and for unity, but doing this partisan reconciliation bill when there is no demonstrated need for this deficit spending is not healing the divisions in our country or promoting unity.

Saturday will mark 1 year since the first COVID-19 response bill was signed into law. Since then we have, tragically, lost more than a half million Americans; families have struggled with job losses; small businesses have closed their doors; and children have fallen further and further behind.

The list of hardships endured over the past year is long indeed, but now our colleagues across the aisle are trying to capitalize on that pain by passing the so-called and misnamed COVID-19 relief bill that does more to advance partisan goals than to bring an end to this national nightmare. It does nothing to get our kids back in school or our American workers back on the job.

It doles out taxpayer dollars for favored infrastructure projects—these are colloquially called earmarks—like the bridge in the majority leader's home State of New York and a subway system in the Speaker's home State of California. What do those have to do with COVID-19? Where is the emergency there? Why should we borrow money from future generations to fund these infrastructure projects that have nothing to do with the pandemic?

We can deal with infrastructure, and we should, going forward, but opportunistically exploiting the public's concern about COVID-19 in order to fund these infrastructure projects in New York and California is simply inexcusable.

(Mr. LUJAN assumed the Chair.)

Only 1 percent of the funding in this massive \$1.9 trillion bill goes toward vaccination efforts. We all understand that vaccinating the American people is the key for ending this crisis. So far—and I am sure I am a day or so behind—a couple of days ago, we vaccinated 68 million people—68 million vaccinations, perhaps. Some of them involved two shots. And we are vaccinating people at the rate of 3 million shots a day. That is really, really encouraging. But only 1 percent of the funding in this \$1.9 trillion bill goes toward that eventual key to unlocking the future.

As I said, every penny that is spent on pandemic response is borrowed from our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. Somebody is going to have to pay the money back—not us, not now, apparently. We are going to borrow the money, add to deficits and debt.

As Larry Summers and others have said, we are even risking inflation by throwing so much money into the economy so quickly, at a time when it is growing at more than 4 percent a year. And we are not, if this effort is successful, spending this money responsibly. Being responsible means doing what is needed—no more, no less—to bring this pandemic to an end and get this country back on its feet.

I think this bill is a shameful waste of taxpayer dollars. And it is outrageous that it is entitled the COVID-19 relief bill when so little of this bill actually deals with the pandemic. As we say, where I come from, if you put lipstick on a pig, it is still a pig.

TEXAS INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. President, I didn't know our colleague from New Mexico was going to be the Presiding Officer now, but being our next-door neighbor, maybe he will appreciate a little short speech about Texas Independence Day.

One hundred eighty-five years ago, on March 2, 1836, Texas adopted its Declaration of Independence from Mexico. This happened in the context of a struggle that perhaps is best remembered by the Battle of the Alamo, which laid some of the groundwork to Texans—or as they called themselves back then, Texians—eventual victory.

I always remind people that virtually everybody died at the Battle of the Alamo. It was actually the Battle of San Jacinto that won the war. But just 1 week shy of this momentous day, a 26-year-old lieutenant colonel in the Texas Army named William Barrett Travis and his fellow soldiers were outnumbered nearly 10 to 1 by the forces of the Mexican dictator, Antonio López de Santa Anna. Colonel Travis wrote a letter that has arguably become the most famous document in Texas history.

Here in the Senate, both Republicans and Democrats from Texas, have had the honor of reading that letter every year since 1961, when then-Senator John Tower began that tradition.

So, today, I would like to express my gratitude for these Texas patriots, many of whom would go on to serve in the U.S. Congress, including Sam Houston, whose Senate seat I am honored to occupy, and it is my great honor to read the Travis letter here on the Senate floor.

The letter was addressed “To the People of Texas and All Americans [Around] the World.”

Fellow citizens & compatriots—I am besieged, by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna—I have sustained a continual Bombardment & cannonade for 24 hours & have not lost a man—The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion. Otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken—I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, & our flag still waves proudly from the walls—I shall never surrender or retreat. Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism & everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid, with all dispatch—The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country—Victory or Death.

Signed:

William Barrett Travis, Lt. Col. Comdt.

As I said, in the battle that ensued, all 189 defenders of the Alamo gave their lives, but they did not die in vain. In fact, we Texans might not be around if it weren't for them. We might still be part of Mexico.

The Battle of the Alamo bought precious time for the Texas revolutionaries, allowing General Sam Houston to maneuver his army into position for a decisive victory, as I said, in the Battle of San Jacinto.

For 9 years, the Republic of Texas thrived as a nation. That is the reason we fly our flag at the same height as the U.S. flag, unlike other States. But then in 1845, we were annexed to the United States as the 28th State.

Every single day, I am honored to represent the people of my State here in the U.S. Senate, an opportunity that would not be possible without the sacrifices made by brave men like William Barret Travis 185 years ago.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I would thank my colleague from Texas for sharing the Texas letter with us again this year. It is always inspiring to hear those words, to remember the sacrifices that were made in Texas. It reminds us all of the sacrifices that are made daily across this country by people who love this country and stand for its unity.

Thank you, Mr. President, to my colleague from Texas.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, I come to the floor today because the Senate will likely

vote soon on the Biden stimulus bill. I think all of us in this Chamber agree that we want to get relief to the American people. That was our objective when we passed the CARES Act last year, which allocated \$2.2 trillion for the relief effort. It was our objective when we passed four other COVID relief bills in 2020—and these brought the total up to \$4 trillion. All of these measures were the result of bipartisan cooperation and negotiations—Democrats and Republicans working together.

But right now, the President and congressional Democrats are pushing a completely partisan product through a totally partisan process to promote their progressive agenda. They call it the American Rescue Plan, and the price tag is \$1.9 trillion, more than double what we spent after the financial crisis starting in 2008.

When combined with the five COVID packages we have already enacted, the total cost to the American taxpayers would be close to \$6 trillion, more than the GDP of every country other than China and the United States. And as of the end of January, hundreds of billions of dollars from these bills has yet to be spent.

December's relief bill dedicated \$284 billion to the Paycheck Protection Program, but only a quarter of those funds had been obligated. That same bill provided \$20 billion for Economic Injury Disaster Loans, none of it had been spent by February 1. The same is true of the CARES Act spending for community planning programs, for which hundreds of millions of dollars remain unspent. Over 90 percent of these bills' combined funding for mental health programs was sitting idle as of late January as well.

The White House calls this bill “emergency legislative package to fund vaccinations, provide immediate, direct relief to families bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 crisis, and supporting struggling communities.”

Each of these things is important, and support for them should absolutely be part of any package we pass. But when you look somewhere other than the White House website to find out what is actually in this bill, you see that many parts of it don't belong in a package that is meant to help us recover from our fight against this virus.

Let us start with what will make the biggest difference for working families: the direct payments to individual Americans. For months, I have supported sending these checks. I went on the record in December to say that people are hurting and that we should help them with more aid in the form of direct payments.

I think these payments are a good idea, but they should be targeted to those who truly need them, not sent to people who haven't been affected in the same way as the millions of Americans who have lost their jobs.

If this once-in-a-century pandemic hasn't put you out of work at one point

or another, you have been lucky. But this plan would give you a check even if you have never lost your job and struggled to pay your bills. That is not right.

This administration had time to work with Republicans to make sure those who need help get it. They didn't do that. Instead, people who never lost their job get a check. People who were never furloughed get a check. And financially stable families who earned as much as \$200,000 last year—well, they still get a check too.

If so many Americans are hurting, as we all know they are, our only focus should be getting this aid into their hands, not using their insecurity as a chance to pass a bunch of wish list items from this progressive agenda.

The White House wants Congress to spend billions of dollars on things that no COVID aid bill should be addressing. Many other Senators have expressed similar concerns. We believe that every cent of any COVID relief bill needs to go toward recovery from the effects of COVID on families and on communities.

The new administration has a chance to show that they really are interested in “bipartisanship” and “unity”—two words President Biden uses just about every day. They could prove that today by reaching out to Republicans in good faith, but, so far, any effort by the administration to do so has only been to provide an appearance of working together, not to make any actual progress on any kind of bipartisan product. Instead, they are focusing on filling this package with progressive priorities.

So let's take a look at some of the items on that list: giving \$30 billion to public transit authorities, even though President Biden only asked for \$20 billion and several major Agencies have said the December relief bill would get them through at least until summer; spending \$50 million on family planning programs that wouldn't have Hyde protections, meaning that our tax dollars would pay for elective abortions; allowing Planned Parenthood to receive the small business funding from the Paycheck Protection Program; dedicating another \$50 million to the troubling vague goal of “combating the climate crisis”; sending \$12 billion overseas in aid—this does not belong in a domestic COVID response bill—and spending over \$100 million on a subway system near Speaker PELOSI's district in the Bay area. I will leave it up to my Democratic colleagues to explain how expanding a subway in Northern California would help all Americans “build back better” in this pandemic. So far, they are silent.

This is supposed to be an emergency rescue plan for the Americans who have been hit hardest by COVID, but, instead, the Biden stimulus plan doesn't make any of the tough decisions we need to make, and it uses Americans' hard-earned tax dollars as a blank check.